

Jan. 2nd, 1793.

I have just received yours of the 30th, and feel much for your situation. However, I heartily rejoice in your prospect of recovery from that vile jaundice. As to myself, I am better, though not quite free of my complaint. You must not think, as you seem to insinuate, that in my way of life I want exercise. Of that I have enough; but occasional hard drinking is the devil to me. Against this I have again and again bent my resolution, and have greatly succeeded. Taverns I have totally abandoned: it is the private parties in the family way, among the hard-drinking gentlemen of this country, that do me the mischief—but even this I have more than half given over.

Mr. Corbet can be of little service to me at present; at least I should be shy of applying. I cannot possibly be settled as a supervisor for several years. I must wait the rotation of the list, and there are twenty names before mine.—I might indeed get a job of officiating, where a settled supervisor was ill, or aged; but that hauls me from my family, as I could not remove them on such an uncertainty. Besides, some envious, malicious devil has raised a little demur on my political principles, and I wish to let that matter settle before I offer myself too much in the eye of my supervisors. I have set, henceforth, a seal on my lips, as to these unlucky politics; but to you I must breathe my sentiments. In this, as in everything else, I shall show the undisguised emotions of my soul. War I deprecate: misery and ruin to thousands are in the blast that announces the destructive demon. But. . . . R. B.

CLXXX.—TO MR. ROBERT GRAHAM OF FINTRY.

DUMFRIES, Morning of 5th Jan. 1793.

SIR,—I am this moment honoured with your letter. With what feelings I received this other instance of your goodness I shall not pretend to describe.

Now to the charges which malice and misrepresentation

have brought against me.* It has been said, it seems, that I not only belong to, but head a disaffected party in this town. I know of no party here, republican or reform, except an old Burgh-Reform party, with which I never had anything to do. Individuals, both republican and reform, we have, though not many of either; but if they have associated, it is more than I have the least knowledge of, and if such an association exist it must consist of such obscure, nameless beings as precludes any possibility of my being known to them, or they to me.

I was in the playhouse one night when *Cd Ira* was called for. I was in the middle of the pit, and from the pit the clamour arose. One or two persons, with whom I occasionally associate, were of the party, but I neither knew of, nor joined in the plot, nor at all opened my lips to hiss or huzza that, or any other political tune whatever. I looked on myself as far too obscure a man to have any weight in quelling a riot, and at the same time as a person of higher respectability than to yell to the howlings of a rabble. I never uttered any invectives against the king. His private worth it is altogether impossible that such a man as I can appreciate; but in his public capacity I always revered, and always will with the soundest loyalty revere the monarch of Great Britain as—to speak in masonic—the sacred keystone of our royal arch constitution. As to Reform principles, I look upon the British Constitution, as settled at the Revolution, to be the most glorious on earth, or that perhaps the wit of man can frame; at the same time I think, not alone, that we have a good deal deviated from the original principles of that Constitution,—particularly, that an alarming system of corruption has pervaded the connection between the Executive and the House of Commons. This is the whole truth of my Reform opinions, which, before I knew the complexion of these innovating times, I too unguardedly as I now see sported with: henceforth I seal up my lips. But I never dictated to,

* Because of what Burns elsewhere called "Some temeraire conduct of mine, in the political opinions of the day."

corresponded with, or had the least connection with any political association whatever. Of Johnstone, the publisher of the *Edinburgh Gazetteer*, I know nothing. One evening, in company with four or five friends, we met with his prospectus, which we thought manly and independent; and I wrote to him, ordering his paper for us. If you think I act improperly in allowing his paper to come addressed to me, I shall immediately countermand it. I never wrote a line of prose to *The Gazetteer* in my life. An address, spoken by Miss Fontenelle on her benefit night, and which I called "The Rights of Woman," I sent to *The Gazetteer*, as also some stanzas on the Commemoration of the poet Thomson: both of these I will subjoin for your perusal. You will see they have nothing whatever to do with politics.

As to France, I was her enthusiastic votary in the beginning of the business. When she came to shew her old avidity for conquest by annexing Savoy and invading the rights of Holland, I altered my sentiments.

This, my honoured patron, is all. To this statement I challenge disquisition. Mistaken prejudice or unguarded passion may mislead, have often misled me; but when called on to answer for my mistakes, though no man can feel keener compunction for them, yet no man can be more superior to evasion or disguise.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your ever grateful, etc.,

ROBT. BURNS.

CLXXXI.—TO MR. ALEX. CUNNINGHAM, W.S., EDINBURGH.

DUMFRIES, 20th Feb. 1793.

WHAT are you doing? What hurry have you got on your head, my dear Cunningham, that I have not heard from you? Are you deeply engaged in the mazes of the law, the mysteries of love, or the profound wisdom of *politics*? Curse on the word!

Q. What is Politics?

A. It is a science wherewith, by means of nefarious